

# Pharmacy Practice, COVID-19 and the Future

The Ghana College of Pharmacists (GCP) is pleased to introduce the *GCP Journal* to all and sundry. The *GCP Journal*, a bi-annual publication, will serve as the official journal of the College and is targeted at practicing pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, pharmaceutical industries and the scientific community, as a whole. The *GCP Journal* will also serve as a reference material and heighten the proficiency of the practicing pharmacist.

The *GCP Journal* is peer-reviewed and will publish, among others, original scientific papers, scientific reviews, case studies, features and news items.

This maiden edition of the *GCP Journal* is themed "Pharmacy, COVID-19 and the Future" and focuses on the status of pharmacy today and its future prospects as related to pandemics such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first editorial of this journal, therefore, dissects the increasing complexity and challenges of health care delivery as well as opportunities for growth in innovation and influence for pharmacy and the pharmacist within the context of present and future pandemics as exemplified by the advent of COVID-19.

The future of any profession needs to be a matter of concern for academics and practitioners alike and pharmacy is no different. The galloping development of medical technology has disrupted and wiped out the traditionally clear-cut roles in healthcare without the accompanying shift in the legal environment regulating the practice of pharmacy. Healthcare has become more decentralized and pharmacy needs to be redefined since evidence postulates that, in most instances, pharmacists represent the first access to a healthcare professional for a face-to-face patient encounter, whether physically or digitally. In addition, as patients of the 21<sup>st</sup> century evolve with dependence on technology, pharmacy and pharmaceutical care must evolve in congruence with this dependence.

Pharmacy has devolved from the older roles of product-centred practice and embraced newer approaches to patient-centred care. Combining technology with the practice, pharmacy practitioners will no longer be considered as "Medi-Gurus" but

"Medi-Tech Gurus", providing specialized medication consultancies within the life cycle of a medication. Pharmacy needs to better predict and depict this possibility so that it can better prepare for the next quantum jump in the world of pharmacy and operate within the context of digitalization in analytics, product development and production, sales and marketing, clinical trials, regulatory affairs and compliance, direct patient care as well as train personnel to support the new paradigm.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the past year witnessed unprecedented challenges and opportunities for most industries, including pharmacy. The period increased the dependency of humanity on technology and showed the need to invest in capacities to early detect diseases and rapidly respond to emerging infections as well as rely on evidence for policy-making. Since evidence shows that epidemics and pandemics will continue to challenge healthcare well into the future, pharmacy and the health system, as a whole, need to strengthen capacities to forecast, prevent and adequately manage them to ensure cost effective universal coverage and to save lives.

COVID-19 has released unprecedented opportunities for change in pharmacy practice like provision of reliable information for preventing, detecting, treating and managing coronavirus infections and its ilk within the domain of practice. A decentralized approach to pharmacy that provides the most proactive patient care in a location most convenient to patients and tele-patient care fall into place for the pharmacy of tomorrow. This feature requires that pharmacists and pharmacies employ digital technology to improve service.

In conclusion, pharmacists and pharmacy must keep pushing the boundaries to advance the use of medicines and improve patient care. The advent of COVID -19 has brought up opportunities and challenges. While tackling the challenges, pharmacists can leverage on the opportunities of digitalization to better prepare for the practice of the future.